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Desa Mawacara, Negara Mawatata: Bali's Customary Village-Based State Policies in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRAK

Desa adat di Bali menjadi lokus penting dari alat negara dalam penanggulangan pandemi Covid-19. Sejarah relasi desa adat dengan negara berlangsung sejak masa pra-kolonial hingga kini. Pasang surut hubungan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa keberagaman adat dan budaya desa (*desa mawacara*) akan selalu berada dibawah bayang-bayang penataan (kuasa) dari negara (*negara mawatata*). Narasi simbolik *desa mawacara, negara mawatata* menunjukkan kuasa pengaturan yang dilakukan oleh negara terhadap desa adat. Perda No. 4 Tahun 2019 tentang Desa Adat di Bali dan kebijakan satuan tugas gotong royong berbasis desa adat adalah pilihan rasional yang dilakukan oleh Gubernur Bali untuk merangkul dan menjadikan desa adat sebagai ujung tombak penanggulangan Covid-19 di seluruh Bali. Bingkai teori menggunakan perspektif *governmentality* atau kepengaturan dan kekuasaan dari Foucault yang diadopsi oleh Li (2012). Metode pengumpulan data menggunakan teks dari berita media massa sebagai analisis wacana yang dipadukan dengan wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipasi. Artikel ini berargumentasi kebijakan negara terhadap desa adat di Bali memiliki sejarah panjang intervensi (mempengaruhi) sekaligus kooptasi (pembungkaman). Pada masa pandemi Covid-19 di Bali, negara menyadari betul vitalitas dan pengaruh desa adat untuk mengendalikan warganya. Negara dengan sadar memanfaatkan hal tersebut untuk menunjukkan wajah Negara pada desa adat yang telah dikooptasi terlebih dahulu.

Kata kunci: *Desa Mawacara, Negara Mawatata*, kebijakan, desa adat, kooptasi, intervensi

ABSTRACT

Balinese customary villages are at the center of the state's strategy for mitigation of Covid-19. Relations between customary villages and the state predate colonial times. The historical dynamics have shown that the traditions and cultures of customary villages (*desa mawacara*) will always exist within the shadow of the state (*negara mawatata*). The symbolic narrative of *desa mawacara, negara mawatata* illustrates the governmentality that the state exercises over the villages. Regional Regulation No. 4/2019 on Customary Villages in Bali and the formation of the customary village-based task force were rational choices made by the Governor of Bali to place the villages at the forefront of the province's strategy against the pandemic. This article employs Li's (2012) adaptation of Foucault's concept of governmentality in its analysis. Discourse

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analysis was conducted with regards to information extracted from mass media, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation. This article argues that the state's policies for Balinese customary villages are deeply entrenched in its long history of intervention and cooptation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the state has been well aware of the extensive influence that customary villages hold over their communities. The state utilizes this reality to exert its authority.

Keywords: *Desa Mawacara*, *Negara Mawatata*, policy, customary villages, cooptation, intervention

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INTRODUCTION

Ring Bali sampun kaloktah
 Wenten desa maka kalih
 Desa dinas desa adat
 Sami pada makta sulur
 Nyulur indik kesukertan
 Yan upami maka kalih marabian

 Desa dinas sane lanang
 Pinaka I aji yukti
 Ngayah ring guru wisesa
 Ngamargian sapitutuh
 Ring desa adat I biyang
 Ngardi trepti
 Tunggal ring pasemetonan

 Ring kahuripan punika
 Desa sane maka kalih
 Prajurune patut tatas
 Nenten pacang pati kaplug
 Santukan nuntun I krama
 Ngeranjing kalih
 Mewasta dados kelihan

(Pupuh Ginada dari Geguritan Desa Adat di Bali oleh Ni Made Sri Arwati, MPLA Bali, 1990/1991)

The *pupuh*—traditional Balinese song—above tells the tale of two Balinese villages, a customary village and an administrative village, and

portrays them as husband and wife. The husband, the personification of the administrative village, is mandated to serve the *guru wisesa*, the government. His obligation is to maintain order in accordance with the state's commands and interests. The wife, the customary village, is tasked to preserve the unity and harmony of traditions, religions, and culture among the *krama*, the people, of Bali. The two villages co-exist in harmony in guiding the people to order. The relation between the villages symbolizes the diversity of *dresta* (traditions) and their practices. Meanwhile, the state is present to organize their heterogeneity. These arrangements are known as *Desa Mawacara, Negara Mawatata*.¹

The portrayed harmony between the two villages has had a long history. The ebb and flow of governance duality in Bali predate the colonial era. Based on a Balinese artifact, the customary villages were previously known as *karaman*. During pre-Hindu times, communities banded together in what was called the *wanua*. A *wanua* was recognized as a legal entity under the leadership of the *sanat*, *tuha-tuha* or *talaga*. All three words—*sanat*, *tuha*, and *talaga*—carry the same meaning: the elderly. The *wanua* or *karaman* provided crucial resources for the Balinese kingdoms. They act as realms for kingdoms to sustain their powers (Dharmayuda 1995, 28–9; Goris 1954; Schulte Nordholt 2006).

Rigg's (1994) study of Southeast Asian villages painted a picture of communities with egalitarian values and strong autonomy, reliance on subsistence, and tranquility and social values forged by history. As described in Schulte Nordholt's (2006) examination of the Dutch bureaucracy in Bali, the traditional irrigation system for rice fields was called a *subak*. Kings and local official formed a group of *subak*. Their leader was called the *sedahan*. Along with the *mekel*, the village leaders assigned to regulate community order, the *sedahan* connected the royal palace with the people. The main duty of the *mekel* was to mobilize the people to serve the palace.

The group of officials consisted of people with connections or familial relations with the kings and local rulers. They were people of

¹ Balinese philosophy allows customary villages to have their own way of managing their territories while the state has the power to control the different methods.

nobility; only they could assume those positions. It was through such mechanisms that supra-village powers consolidated their presence in the villages in Bali. However, the relations between the people and the rulers were dynamic; the people and their interests were not always sidelined by the interests of the supra-village powers.

The political power of the Balinese kings was represented by their possessions (*druwe*), as manifested in mobilized human resources. This relation between the rulers and their followers was not stable. The kings had certain obligations toward their followers and servants, and were expected to grant them rewards for their loyalty. Kings could not merely dispense orders; they were also expected to motivate their people.

It was not unusual for villages to secede or break away from the dominions by which they were ruled. Secession tended to occur when villages felt insecure or unaccommodated by their rulers. In such situations, villages would transfer their loyalty to other local rulers or kingdoms that they deemed more capable of providing security and protection. Thus it was that villages' loyalty and attachment to their rulers were not permanent, but rather relied on the dynamics and contexts of political relations (Gunawan 2014, 109–10).

The enactment last year of Regional Regulation No. 4/2019 on Customary Villages in Bali brought crucial momentum for the penetration of supra-village powers into the customary villages. It was further cemented by the formation of the provincial Dinas Pemajuan Masyarakat Adat (Indigenous Peoples Development Agency, or DPMA). The *bendesa* (leaders) of the Balinese customary villages were also involved in the Majelis Desa Adat (Customary Village Assembly (MDA)) of Bali. Along with the DPMA, they manage some IDR 300 million in government funds. The passing of the Regional Regulation on Customary Villages in Bali was the state's attempt to still retain some control over the villages.

During the Covid-19 pandemic in Bali, the Provincial Governor, together with the MDA of Bali, initiated the formation of the *gotong-royong*—loosely translated as cooperation—Covid-19 Task Force in Bali, which utilized the Balinese customary villages as its foundation. The

policy was formulated as a program to empower the *karma*, the people, of the customary villages and the *yowana* (youth) to mitigate the virus, in both the *sekala* (seen) and *niskala* (unseen) realms. The state placed the customary villages at the front lines of that effort.²

This article explores the implementation of the policy to form the customary village-based Covid-19 Task Force in Bali. It emphasizes the application of rational choice by Bali Governor I Wayan Koster to place the province's customary villages on the frontline of the Covid-19 effort. The decision to make customary villages a grassroots extension of the state was made through the promulgation of the Regional Regulation of Customary Villages. It was through this instrument that the Balinese customary villages became tools for the use and fulfillment of the state's interests.

The first section of this paper highlights the implications of the Regional Regulation on Customary Villages as an attack on the independence of the villages. The second part analyzes the responses of the people—the *pecalang*³ and *prajuru* (officials) who spearheaded the fight against Covid-19. These people have been the executors of the Governor's and MDA of Bali's joint decree on the "Gotong-Royong Customary Village-Based Task Force for the Prevention of the Covid-19."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of colonial era customary villages have portrayed Balinese customary villages as exotic and autonomous. Portraits of colonial rule have forged this imagery of the villages, which played a part in the strategy to exert power over them. Liefrinck (1927), a colonial Dutch administrative official who resided in Buleleng, studied the ancient villages in North Bali between 1886-1887, illustrating them as exotic and free from the influence of the outside world. This orientalist and exotic perspective implied that Balinese villages resembled small republics

2 See the Joint Decree by the Governor of Bali and Customary Village Assembly of Bali No. 472/1571/PPDA/DPMA and No. 05/SK/MDA-Prov Bali/III/2020 on the Formation of the Customary Village-Based *Gotong-Royong* Task Force for the Prevention of Covid-19.

3 Balinese Hindu community traditional police who wear Balinese traditional clothes in carrying out their duties.

with their own set of legal or cultural arrangements. Their government structures were viewed as democratic, inasmuch as every individual was recognized to have the same and equal legal rights. Those chosen as leaders were those who had stayed in the villages the longest, or *tetua*. Conceptually, the Balinese villages were described as sovereign areas with their own governments, untouched by external powers (Leifrinck 1927; Parimatha 2013, 61).

This construction of colonial narratives that regard these villages as autonomous entities was reinforced by Korn (1932). He called them *Dorpsrepubliek*, village republics that were autonomous, democratic, and enclosed. He arrived at that conclusion following his exploration of Tenganan Village, Karangasem. The image of Balinese customary villages as free and autonomous village republics was created and sustained by the colonial Dutch bureaucracy. That portrayal was accomplished through the accumulation and reiteration of knowledge by colonial bureaucrats and ethnologists. Parimatha (2013, 62) pointed out that the works and construction of colonial political culture by Lienfrinck were efforts to undermine the authority and roles of royal families toward the villages in Bali.

The colonial political culture constructed and sustained by Lieftrinck and Korn was intended to ensure that Bali remained unspoiled. This required that the villages remain free from external influence. At the time, the Dutch employed a colonial strategy known as *Baliseering*,⁴ or the “Balinization of Bali.” The gist of *Baliseering* was to leave, if not protect, the Balinese to carry out their own lifestyles, which were viewed as “beautiful and free,” from interference. The Balinese, with their unique culture, were regarded as a “living museum” whose existence must be protected and preserved.

This tradition was utilized by the Dutch colonial rulers for their administration’s interests. The Dutch built their bureaucratic network from the lowest levels of society. They developed their colonial ad-

⁴ Cultural political movement carried out by the Dutch colonial government to maintain Balinese traditionalism in its customs and culture. The goal was to make Bali a living cultural museum untouched by the outside world.

ministration *dienst*, or administrative villages, that did not disturb the customary villages, which had existed since the pre-colonial period (1910–1920s). The administrative villages were built to conduct administrative and political affairs, while the traditional villages were related to customary governance, remaining autonomous in accordance with the colonial strategy of *Baliseering* (Schulte Nordholt 1991; 1994; Robinson 2005; Gunawan 2014, 119–22).

The construction of narratives by the Dutch during their colonial rule had much to do with their desire to conserve the Balinese villages, free from the control of the palace and the influence of Islam. This ambition was in accordance with the *Baliseering* ideology. The power of supra-villages has always influenced the development of villages. The Dutch administration aspired to shield the Balinese traditional villages from external influence, but at the same time they introduced a scheme that turned out to play a major part in the development of Balinese customary villages.

Post-colonial Bali did not escape the clutches of cooptation. If previously it was colonial rule that exerted its authority over the villages, in the post-colonial era, it was the state that imposed regulations to penetrate these very traditional institutions. The enactment of Laws Nos. 5/1974 and 5/1975 replaced the roles of cultural leaders—whether elected or appointed—with village head who have been screened by the state. These head of villages were then tasked to conform and work within the national bureaucratic structures (Henley and Davidson 2010, 13).

During the authoritarian New Order, traditional villages faced further challenges but persevered. This was well exemplified by the enactment of Bali's Regional Regulation No. 6/1986. The regulation ruled that the customary villages function as *dresta* villages, or as legal customary entities within Bali's First Level Area. The villages were recognized to have their own Hindu traditions and customs, which have been passed on between generations within the *Khayangan Tiga*, and their own territories and resources, as well the autonomy to manage them. This regulation was later replaced with Regional Regulation No. 3/2003 on *Pakraman* Villages. The term "*pakraman* villages" was introduced to

replace “customary villages,” which were used in the previous regional regulation, but the substance of the provisions remained the same.

Recently, the government issued Regional Regulation No. 4/2019 on Customary Villages in Bali. This regulation introduced new provisions on the concept of *Sad Kerthi*, the foundational philosophy of Governor I Wayan Koster and Soekarno’s Tri Sakti. The policy recognized customary villages as legal customary entities with their own regions, standing, indigenous structures, customary rights, traditions, and resources. These attributes were understood to be passed on between generations within the *kahyangan tiga*. Customary villages had the rights and authority to arrange their own affairs.

The customary villages were also recognized to rest upon the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, which stemmed from the local wisdom *Sad Kerthi* and the Hindu and Balinese cultural values. Along with the Balinese local wisdom, these foundations played a significant role in the development of the communities, making their preservation and protection necessary for the maintenance of a sovereign, economically independent, and culturally rich Balinese *krama*.

The perpetuated cooptation of customary villages by supra-village powers was apparent. Criticisms of the romanticism and ambition to “sterilize” customary villages with the aim to coopt them with the state’s political powers were not new. The same tactic could be found in other regions in Southeast Asia, where many villages were influenced by supra-village powers. The instruments to exercise control over traditional villages alone have had their own long history. Villages were never fully free from external control and pressure. In such contexts, tensions between internal and external powers were common, with their implications often associated with social change.

Scott’s (2009) study showed that villages in Southeast Asia were never free from the penetration of outside forces nor the state. Such influences came in the form of kingdoms, colonial rule, or national government control. Villages, particularly those in the mountainous areas of Southeast Asia, have long wielded strategies to remain autonomous from supra-village powers, especially those of the state.

Balinese villages have experienced shifts throughout their history due to the intervention of external forces. Interactions between customary and administrative villages underwent frictions caused by influences from the outside, such as reforms and policies exercised over customary villages. Within those processes, however, the external forces were neither continuous nor stand-alone factors for change. The external forces aimed to inspire the Balinese to organically reform their internal village structures. However, their implementation was not without challenges. The issue of their loyalty, as well as the opposition of customary villages against such authorities depended on the contexts and power relations between them. Such contexts comprised instruments of regulation, cooptation, and arrangements of funds in establishing the power networks and relations between customary villages and the state.

According to Schulte Nordholt (1991), it is important to examine the relations between the “modern” state that aspires to expand its political power and the accumulation of capital and the traditional institutions that wish to preserve their traditions and authority. During the New Order, the state enforced the depoliticization of the Balinese by utilizing the Balinese traditions and rituals to exert state control over the region. The *Baliseering* perspective and depoliticization are being replicated today. The strategy has been instrumentalized through a variety of regulations that exert control over the customary villages.

The enactment of regulations and depoliticization against customary villages made the communities susceptible to exclusion from their own political environments and aspirations. Acciaioli and Nasrum (2020) referred to such contexts of marginalization as frontierization. This concept took inspiration from the idea of fluid social zones between rulers and the ruled in institutional and social complexities.

Acciaioli and Nasrum (2020, 59), who adopted Tsing's (2005) concept of *frontier*, also cited that of Geiger (2008), who referred to these areas as, “*remote from political centers which hold strategic significance or economic potentials for human exploitation, and are contested by social formations of unequal power.*”



The Governor of Bali, the Head of *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI), and Head of the *Majelis Desa Adat* (MDA) have passed a number of policies during the Covid-19 pandemic (photo: Antara/Fikri Yusuf)

RESEARCH METHODS

The various state policies on customary villages are strongly linked to the desire to improve the state's developmental strategies, which were initiated by the state, their apparatus, and their interest groups. These policies were constructed within the framework of governmentality. Within this framework, it is necessary to consider the issue of "imagination," especially pertaining to the imagination of intervention by the state against customary villages (Prahara 2018).

This perspective was derived from a critique by Ferguson (1990), that asserted that development with emphasis on technical programs have depoliticized communities. Developmental interventions have reduced the complexities and problems of people's livelihoods to mere technical matters. The technicalization of issues in development have paved the way for the consolidation of technocratic regimes.

In the context of the state and customary villages, governmentality was established through a set of regulations and their executors: the state apparatus and its networks. Its purpose was to improve village situations that were considered problematic. Unfortunately, this will to

improve such situations was not fully altruistic, but rather founded on the interest to expand power. This desire did not arise in a vacuum.

Li (2012, 11), quoting Foucault, wrote,

Defined succinctly as the “conduct of conduct,” government is the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means. Distinct from discipline, which seeks to reform designated groups through detailed supervision in confined quarters (prisons, asylums, schools), the concern of government is the wellbeing of populations at large.

The will to improve through governmentality was packaged with the image of ensuring the people's welfare, lengthening their life expectancy, and improving their healthcare, among other aspects. It was based on these narratives that governmentality was said to configure habits, aspirations, and beliefs.

The governmental rationality was to formulate “the right manner of disposing things,” in the pursuit of achieving not one dogmatic goal, but rather “a whole series of specific finalities” to be achieved through “multiform tactics.” (Li 2012, 6). Calculations were thus prioritized, as governmentality requires the selection of “right methods,” the prioritization of “finalities,” and the fine-tuning of tactics to achieve optimal results (Li 2012, 6). Calculations, in turn, demand the illustration of tactics in technical terms. Only then can specific interventions be devised (Li 2012, 11–3).

At the policy level, rulers formulate policies with the guidance of a technocratic regime. Public officials—in the context of this article, the Governor of Bali—are fully aware when applying the rational choice theory. The theory's main argument is that all sets of policies are founded on the interests of rulers to maintain their power. The rational choice theory at the individual level states that individuals' interests and motivations shape the actions that they take, through the assessment of cost and benefits of each action. Individuals are rational beings in their own right. Another important perspective is that individuals have autonomy in choosing the routes to fulfill their interests (Savirani 2007, 94).



A banner of a customary village based Covid-19 Task Force in a village in Denpasar (photo: I Ngurah Suryawan)

Gaddes (1993) asserted that when an individual is positioned as the highest bearer of executive powers, there are three things that they will attempt to do. First, they will ensure that they remain in power, at the very least during their expected term of leadership. Second, they will generate a loyal political machine to support them. Third, they will aim to govern effectively. An effective government is one that fulfills the functions of regulation, control, and serving the people.

This paper employs a discursive method to analyze information and texts in mass media. Apart from the use of discourse analysis to make sense of texts in mass media, participatory observation and in-depth interviews were also conducted. Information was gathered and compiled from news and field observation conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. More specifically, the texts in reference were Regional Regulation No. 4/2019 on Customary Villages in Bali, Joint Decree by the Governor of Bali and Customary Village Assembly of Bali No. 472/1571/PPDA/DPMA and No. 05/SK/MDA-Prov Bali/III/2020 on the Formation of the Customary Village-Based *Gotong-Royong* Task Force for the Prevention of Covid-19.

The main targets of the discourse analysis were news—both on- and offline—that discussed the formation of Bali's customary village-based Covid-19 Task Force as well as public response to the policy, as they are critical to the arguments conveyed in this article. The *pecalang*, the traditional security officers in Bali's customary villages, played a very important role as they were at the frontlines of the customary village-based mitigation of Covid-19.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many Balinese responded joyfully to the enactment of Regional Regulation No. 5/2019 on Customary Villages. The signing of an artifact was performed in celebration of the regulation's promulgation on June 4, 2019 at Pura Samuan Tiga, Gianyar. The event was widely viewed as the beginning of the "New Bali" momentum, strengthening Bali's "Cultural Guards." Some even envisioned the return of Bali's glory. The regulation was viewed as a form of protection, a legal umbrella for the survival of customary villages—*desa adat*—which was previously recognized as *desa pakraman* in Regional Regulation No. 3/2001.

However, the new regulation did draw some public controversy. Among the issues that caught the most attention were:

- the new terms for Lembaga Perkreditan Desa (LPD), a village-owned financial institution, which was changed to Labda Pecingkreman Desa;
- the arrangement of funds for the *pecalang*;
- the mechanism of choosing *bendesa adat* or tribal leaders through consensus; and
- the allocation of funds from both the regional and national governments.

This regional regulation, which comprised 19 chapters and 103 articles, was accepted without significant resistance. The process went smoothly, as the Balinese public offered their solid support without substantial criticism.

One issue that did draw sharp rebuke was the absence of academic or research papers for the bill, which went uncondemned. It was as if the academic paper that was supposed to act as the foundation for the drafting of the bill was not regarded as important. This was in contrast to the formally recognized vital function of academic papers in the legislative process. It is through research and the writing of academic papers that the complexities of issues are thoroughly mapped and discussed. Although the issuance of a regulation simplifies the subjects for whom the set of rules are made, at least the underlying problems are analyzed and understood. Unfortunately, the drafting of the Regional Regulation on Customary Villages dismissed the critical nature of this process.

The empowerment of the Balinese customary villages on December 12, 2018 was met with euphoria. That, too, took place at Pura Samuan Tiga, Gianyar. At the time, the event was called *Paruman Agung Krama Bali*. The main agenda of the ceremony was the declaration of *Samuan Tiga* for the strengthening of the Balinese customary villages. The voices of the Balinese *krama* representation were made to sound homogenous by the tribal, bureaucratic, and political elites. It was as though they had made history in the development and empowerment of customary villages.

The customary villages, previously recognized as *desa adat*, changed to *desa pakraman*, then back to *desa adat*. They played a significant role in the history and political discourse of Balinese culture. The *banjar*⁵ were significant for the gathering of the innocents throughout 1965-1966 when there were mass killings (*kene garis mati*). Robinson (2005) urged the study of the historical context of these events as well as their sites. I agree with Robinson (2005) that this series of events made a major turn in Bali's—and the country's—history. The *banjar* in customary villages, with their *setra* (cemetery) and other historical sites, were wisdoms—living history—in our day-to-day lives. During the period of Golkar in the 1970's and 1980's, customary villages became domains for

⁵ The smallest community that is the buffer of the traditional village. One village can consist of several *banjars*.

mass mobilization. The *banjar* and their communities became targets of *Kuningisasi*—loosely translated as the “process of becoming or being made yellow,” the color of Golkar—against the Indonesian National Party (PNI), that was previously in conflict with the Communist Party (PKI).

The traditional villages were not free from intervention during the dictatorship of the New Order. The issues of empowerment and competition between customary villages were highly popular. During those times, the villages provided large political bases for Golkar. The events of “*kebulatan tekad*”—*determination*—deeply immersed the *banjar* in political interests. In return, the villages were gifted funds for their loyalty and adherence to their tradition. This tactic was well-devised and crafted by the political elites.

The transition between regimes did not diminish the narratives of state-endorsed empowerment and development. These narratives served as sacred and effective tools to portray the will to improve the livelihoods of communities in customary villages, who were viewed as helpless. The competitions did not stop, but instead became more entrenched with the *Tri Sandya* worship contests, *setra* (burial) contests, and *jegeg bagus sekaa teruna* or youth organizations. *Mesima krama*—dialog, discussions— were also perpetuated to gain political support and funds, such as social aid and grants. The villages were never free from politics.

The practice of governmentality, through the implementation of development and empowerment programs, suggested the existence of an external threat. I still remember how restless we were when our *Pretima*—part of the Balinese temple—started disappearing from our temples. We placed the blame on the immigrants, whom we called *Nak Jawa*, *Jelme Dauh Tukad*. We immediately set up protection, announced “*Pemulung Dilarang Masuk*”—loosely translated as “Beggars Cannot Enter”—screened newcomers or non-Balinese, and treated them with arrogance. We were prejudiced and racist.



Customary village officials and the *pecalang* have always been targets of state-sponsored development and empowerment policies. (photo: Adrian Suwanto/Radar Bali)

The perceived external threat and the will to improve occurred hand-in-hand. The enactment of the Regional Regulation on Customary Villages was assumed to stem from these perceptions. Politics was not absent from the “good will” to provide institutional protection. We learned that customary villages, with their intricate regulations, tended to exclude their own people. Within the internal structures of the villages, community representatives and tribal leaders were provided room to accumulate political and economic capital. These practices were evident.

According to Li’s (2012) argument, the practice of accumulating power can be translated into the issuance of rules and regulations. The strategies of governmentality that manifested in various policies were initially intended to empower the people of Bali through the protection and preservation of their traditions and customary villages. Through the perspective of governmentality and power, the will to improve the Balinese customary villages was not as genuine as portrayed. This will was now within the realm of political power.

Balinese traditional villages were given the heavy task to protect and preserve Balinese culture. Boldly and courageously, we called for the strengthening of our traditions and customary villages. Our demands were manifested in the enactment of regional regulations. We should

revisit and examine our thoughts about our villages. When we were in our villages, we truly internalized what it meant to be Balinese. If we were to be honest, our attitudes toward preservation were forms of nostalgic romanticism. We aspired to bring back the glories of the past to the contemporary world. Is this our perspective toward customary villages?

The utopian dream of village empowerment must not be enshrined above the respect for differences. It has often been expressed that efforts to consolidate customary villages tend to lead to “cultural violence,” which more often than not scars the communities who are excluded from their own institutions. In 2007, Dharma Palguna wrote,

Comfort and a sense of safety occur within sincere and genuine bargaining between individuals and the institutions that claim to act on behalf of the collective will. Without room for differences, humans will be destroyed by their created institutions. Before long, those very institutions will crumble and collapse on the very people whose lives they've devoured.

He continued, observing that cultures and traditions were human creations intended to provide comfort. However, often when they grow too strong, they become threats. I suspect that the regional regulations that we supported for our customary villages may in turn transform them into political commodities. The masterminds behind such schemes were clearly elites who depicted themselves as protectors of our villages, but instead desired and benefited from access to the economic and political gains to maintain their power.

Bali's provincial regulations that targeted the livelihoods of people at the grassroots, consistently involved customary villages attempting to mitigate Covid-19. The provincial government's advert in the *Harian Bali Post* on May 4, 2020, highlighted the 10 policies enacted by Bali Governor I Wayan Koster in the fight against the pandemic. The first was the formation of the Covid-19 Task Force through Bali's Gubernatorial Decree No. 236/03-B/HK/2020 on March 10, 2020. Bali was the first province in Indonesia to form a Covid-19 Task Force, even before

the central government set up its own Task Force for the Acceleration of Mitigation of Covid-19 on March 13, 2020.

The second policy was the state of awareness issued three days later, through Letter of Statement No. 360/3054/SET/BPBD. That was enacted on the same date through Gubernatorial Decree No. 258/04-G/HK/2020. The third policy was Circular Letter No. 7194/2020 on March 16 that mandated the closure of schools and advised students to study from home using online media, the fulfillment of government administrative tasks from home, the suspension of government travels, with exemptions for emergencies and other urgent matters, and restrictions of mass gatherings. The fourth policy was the appointment of 11 referral hospitals for the treatment of Covid-19 through Bali's Gubernatorial Decree No. 259/03-B/HK/2020, also issued on March 16.

Fifth, the government issued the closure of tourist sites through Circular Letter No. 730/8080/Sekret on March 20, 2020. The sixth was the instruction to restrict mass gatherings, including *tajen* or cockfighting through Circular Letter No. 730/8125/Sekret on the same date. The next action that Governor Koster took was the issuance of a directive for people to practice physical distancing—to not congregate, minimize interactions, minimize outdoor activities, and to work and pray from home. This policy also included the call to suspend all traditional and religious rituals involving mass gatherings. The Governor advised people to postpone travel to and from the province unless for urgent matters and for foreigners to return to their home countries. Border restrictions were to be tightened and officials were instructed to increase monitoring over travelers and to remind them to abide by the Covid-19 protocols.

The eighth policy was Bali Gubernatorial Instruction No. 8551/2020 on the Strengthening of the Prevention and Handling of Covid-19 in Bali. This instruction reinforced the restrictions on people's outdoor activities by prescribing them to study, work, and worship from home. This policy strengthened the restrictions on mass gatherings and tourist operations, as it mandated the closure of tourism sites and recreational

facilities. The focus of this policy is to limit the practice of traditions and religious activities as well as travel.

The ninth decision was the appointment of the University of Udayana's hospital as an isolation center for Covid-19 patients, as decreed through Governor's Letter No. 800/3521/DisKes on March 27, 2020. The tenth was the promulgation of a Joint Decree by the Governor of Bali and the Customary Village Assembly of Bali on the Formation of the Customary Village-Based *Gotong-Royong* Task Force for the Prevention of Covid-19 on March 28, 2020. It was through this policy that Governor Koster mobilized and organized the customary villages in Bali to carry out—*sekala* (seen) and *niskala* (unseen)—measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (*Bali Post* 2020).

The *pecalang* were among the ones at the frontline of the fight against virus. They played a big part in the aforementioned Covid-19 Task Force. On March 16, 2020, Governor Koster mandated the formation of Bali's Covid-19 *Gotong-Royong* Task Force. The decree was made by the Bali Provincial Government, the Customary Village Assembly of Bali, and the PHDI of Bali. This task force was financed by funds of the customary village that were allocated IDR 300 million each. The funds were used for Task Force operations.

The policy that specifically pertains to the roles of *pecalang* and the customary village-based security system was Gubernatorial Regulation No. 26/2020 on *Sipandu Beradat* (Integrated Customary Village-Based Security System). This regulation was founded on the desire to support customary villages in maintaining their *wewidangan*—authority. Governor Koster stated that the integrated security system was needed to maintain the sanctity and harmony of Bali's natural environment. This system was necessary to realize the aspired and idealized—both *sekala* (seen) and *niskala* (unseen)—livelihood of the *krama*.

The aim of this gubernatorial regulation was to achieve and maintain order, security, and tranquility, and sustainably protect the regions and the *krama adat*, *krama tamiu* (visitors or newcomers) and *tamiu* (visitors). Their programs aimed to empower and increase the capacity of the *pecalang*, their infrastructure, and their funding. The *Sipandu*

Beradat were implemented at various levels, namely customary villages, counties, municipalities, and the province. The system's function was to collect data that could cause disruption, as well as to analyze reports of threats to social order and security.

Long before the promulgation of this regulation, it was the role—*pecalang ngayah nindihin*⁶—of the *pecalang* to protect their areas from disease. Although they formed part of the *Gotong-Royong* Task Force, the authority of the *pecalang* was set below that of the customary villages. Unfortunately, the *pecalang* and the Task Force were not provided with healthcare nor equipped with proper work procedures, which exposed them to health risks.

The *pecalang* were highly praised during the Reformation in 1998. At the time, Balinese youth were excited to become part of the Task Force and *pecalang* for *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDI-P). That year (1999), PDI-P held their first congress in Sanur. I witnessed how the assembly was joyfully celebrated, even at the *banjar* level. The positions of *pecalang* to safeguard the congress were popularly advertised. Being a *pecalang* and official of the Task Force was seen as admirable.

I suppose it was these moments that the role of *pecalang* as a representation of traditional Balinese culture made a comeback. After the first PDI-P congress, the terms and positions of *pecalang* blossomed. The *pecalang* became Bali's guardians. After the *pecalang*'s success in guarding the PDI-P's congress, *pecalang* units mushroomed in many customary villages. They were provided with their own posts, given full equipment, and assigned patrol vehicles by their villages. The *pecalang* acted as security officers in the screening of newcomers and maintenance of security after the Bali Bombings in 2002 and 2005 as well as for concerts. The *pecalang* were present in almost every event.

⁶ Balinese traditional security guards work together to protect the territory of their respective traditional villages.



A *pecalang* on duty (Photo: Fikri Yusuf/Antara)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the *pecalang* returned to the frontlines. If it were political parties that previously endorsed their emergence, it was now the state that involved them in the fight to fend off the pandemic. The *pecalang* were so flexible that they could be utilized by many. The awareness and perceived efficacy of the *pecalang* had much to do with the current discourse in Balinese culture that regards disasters and chaos as external attributes. This contrarian view has contributed to the prejudice against immigrants as sources of chaos and trouble, while the Balinese are seen as maintainers of order and traditions. Based on this narrative, “Bali” was envisioned as an entity with clear boundaries, living in its own space (the Bali Island), with its own language (the Balinese language) and lifestyle (the Balinese tradition), and its own religion (Hindu). The discourse around threats and need for preparedness was represented by the presence of the *pecalang* (Santikarma 2004, 123–24).

The *pecalang*'s duty during the pandemic includes limiting people's migration. Yet, were the *pecalang* equipped with health protocols to ensure their safety? Although they are dedicated to their regions, the state needs to ensure their wellbeing. They should not be treated as mere pawns on the frontline in the fight against the pandemic. Although they appear strong, devoted, and supported through their involvement

in many policies, the *pecalang* are also humans who should be treated as such.

I Putu W, a *kertha banjar* (advisor) in a customary village on the outskirts of Denpasar said there was an overlap of duties between customary and administrative villages in the handling of the pandemic. These two types of villages in Bali formed their own task forces. The performance of their duties was not as smooth as it appeared on paper. The customary villages perceived the formation of the *gotong-royong* task force as the allocation of strategic funds. The IDR 300 million funding became the target. In this context, Putu W observed that the elites competed to gain access to those funds—the formation of task forces was seen as access to money (Interview with I Putu W, May 2 and May 8, 2020).

The swamp of policies and instructions were not comparable to the ability of the state to ease the communities' livelihoods. I Nyoman S, an official in Denpasar complained about this problem. "We're filled with all these guidelines and instructions, there's nothing else," he said, referring to the failure of the state to provide basic necessities for the people. The goods were instead provided by village institutions, such as the *banjar*, traditional villages, LPD, and donations by businesspersons in the area (Interview with I Nyoman S, April 20, and May 15, 2020).

The narrative that went around was that the *pecalang* performed their duties voluntarily. The *bendesa* of the Beng Customary Village, Ida Bagus Putu Bawa, who also took part in the Covid-19 Task Force in Beng County, Regency of Gianyar, stated that the efforts to mitigate the pandemic were carried out without incentives for the village officials. They were given only snacks and meals during the course of their duty. Meanwhile, the Beng Customary Village, with its 1,073 families, have been made aware of the dangers of Covid-19.

The Beng community voluntarily followed all the protocols issued by the *Parisadha Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI) and MDA. Even before the issuance of the protocols, the people of Beng have been seriously following the government instructions. The people obeyed them because they knew well of the dangers of Covid-19. Many companies

in in the village area donated masks, disinfectant, and sanitizers. The village asked for donations from businesspersons with businesses in the area (Prasetia 2020).



Pecalang imposing social sanctions on people who were found without masks (photo: Fikri Yusuf/Antara)

Meanwhile, the *Manggala Agung Pasikian Pecalang* (head of the *pecalang* association) of Bali, I Made Mudra, told different story. Up until May 22, 2020, the *pecalang* of the Denpasar customary village had not been provided any logistical or economic aid, or even health tests. He said,

To this date, there has not been any testing [for the *pecalang* of the Denpasar customary village)]. That was the information I have heard—except for myself and several of my *pecalang* friends who were on duty at the Covid-19 post at the Pulau Galang traffic light, Imam Bonjol—we worked the afternoon and night shifts. Even those tests were given at our requests, and they were only rapid tests. Thankfully they turned out negative.

I Made Mudra opined that the *pecalang* needed to be prioritized to access swab and PCR tests as they were on on-site duty. “This is to check on their health and prevent the transmission of the Covid-19,

as they may be (carriers) without symptoms,” he said. He hoped that the government would listen to the complaints of the *pecalang* in Bali, who have been heavily involved in the efforts to educate people in their own areas despite the lack of aid from the government, state-owned enterprises, and regional companies. “...(We had) nothing. We were only given meals by people who cared, but nobody does that anymore. We bring our own meals now.” (Radar Bali 2020).

CONCLUSION

The formation of the customary village-based *gotong-royong* task force was found to represent the interests of the state by exerting control over the Balinese customary villages. The *pecalang* and officials of the villages spearheaded the fight against Covid-19. Prior to the pandemic, the customary villages had been coopted and made to work within the state’s structures through the enactment of Regional Regulation No. 4/2019. The state utilized the social capital and influence that villages have over their communities. The villages were effective tools in the handling of the pandemic. The state’s policy to form *gotong-royong* task forces was a rational choice; it has benefited the state by advertising its presence as responsible caregivers for the people.

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